



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Exodus 3: 1-12

“God Encountered and the Servant Commissioned”

TRANSCRIPT

Tonight, our subject is we continue our study of the theme from Egypt to Canaan is God encountered and the servant commissioned. Exodus Chapter 3, which we are dividing into two messages, the Lord willing, is a chapter on “mediation.” God’s use of mediation in the accomplishment of his purposes, you can see it vividly, for example, you take a look at the 8th verse, where we read, and God is speaking, “And I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians...,” and then if you will look on to the 10th verse, you will notice the Lord says, “Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth My people the children of Israel out of Egypt.” So in the 8th verse, God says, “I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians.” In the 10th verse, He says that He is sending Moses to be the instrumentality of the deliverance, and so you can see from this that, what we have here is a chapter that has to do with “mediation.”

The principle is timeless in the divine things as one looks through the Old Testament and see what God does. We often see and it is not surprising to us because we see it is so often that God does do the things that He says He does, but He does them through individuals, through Moses, through Joshua, through Gideon, through Elijah, through the apostles, and others. One can look on into the history of the Christian era

and see this great principle still working and in days of the Arian controversy, it was God working through Athanasius primarily and his defense of the “Homoousian” or “of the principle and the doctrine that Jesus Christ was of like-nature with God,” was of the same nature, I should say, “of God,” rather than “of like-nature with God.” The Homoousian instead of the Homoiousion, just a little, a letter difference, one letter difference in those two particular words, but all the difference in the world between doctrines. Homoousion - of the same nature as the Father.

Homoiousion - The Lord Jesus having a like-nature to the Father. That is the difference between being simply a creature and being the Creator, and Athanasius stood, he suffered a great deal as a result of it for that truth, and as a result, we are indebted to him in the Christian churches, indebted to him for fact that its teachers and preachers down through the centuries have firmly held to the doctrine of the deity of Jesus Christ. God worked through the mediation of Augustine in undertaking to make plain, doctrine of divine grace. There were certain things about divine grace that Augustine did not understand, but when it came to the doctrine of the will of God and the way in which free will contradict divine grace.

It was Augustine who stood against Pelagius, and the result has been that down through the centuries they have always been those who have affirmed the doctrine of the bondage of the Will as over against the doctrine of free will. Luther and Calvin in the Reformation, resurrected and restored that doctrine to the fundamental place it should have in Christian doctrine. So we are indebted to Augustine.

The things that I preach and others here preach on Sunday are things that are taught in the word of God, of course, but humanly speaking, it was Augustine who was responsible for the defense of that doctrine and the defense that Augustine used in his day is still a valid defense. When we think of the things that Lutheran, Calvin, and Knox did with reference to Justification by Faith, we can see how God worked, but he worked through intermediaries, these great Reformants and then Wesley and Whitefield and

Moody and even down to modern times in the use of men like Hudson Taylor, we find God following the Principle of Mediation. We can say it is God who has done these things, but he has done them through individuals.

The great missionary movement that went on in the land of China and still continues in some parts of the East, may be traceable to the one man, Hudson Taylor. George Mueller and what he did in the Bristol Orphanage was again a work of God. It is interesting too to notice how in these matters usually after the individual that God uses, passes of the scene, weakening follows. In other words, one man seems to be a prime instrumentality in the hand of God, he does a mighty work for God through the power of God, but then those who come along with second and third and fourth generation understanding of truth, do not seem to have the grasp of the principles and the same firmness to defend them that those in the beginning had. So, weakness usually follows and you can find it, I think in almost every Christian work.

There are some exceptions, I guess, generally speaking, that is the principle God works through a man and then others receive it second hand and third hand and they do not have the same fundamental conviction about the truth, though they talk in the same language. So, God works and is not it interesting too how God works not from many to the individual, but from the individual to the many. It is almost always that way. He does not do a vast work on the many who in turn reach out and touch individuals, but it is just the other way around. He touches the individual and then the individual is one who reaches out and touches many.

Some have thought that this is illustrated in a passage like Psalm 103 and verse 7, which I am sure many of you will remember, because it is one of the striking verses of the Psalms in which the Psalmist, speaking about Moses and the children of Israel said, “He made known His ways unto Moses, His acts unto the children of Israel.” The difference between the ways of God and the acts of God is the difference between one who understands the Lord God in a more significant way. “He made known His ways,”

those things that characterize His being and His nature to Moses, but his acts, the things that you would see with your eyes, and you may have a real understanding of them, but nevertheless, his acts are the outward things to the children of Israel.

The children of Israel as a body, never had the understanding of divine truth, that individuals like Moses and Joshua and others had, just as today in Christian church. You would be surprised how much work in the Christian Church is traceable ultimately to a few individuals. Many of our Christian churches are like that. That is, there will be a large group of people who meet and outwardly respond to the word of God and may have a genuine understanding of the gospel and the things of the Lord, but in the final analysis, the real work of God is frequently accomplished by the sacrifices and dedication and convictions of a few within the body, that is the Principle of the Remnant as over against the Principle of the Whole Body.

Now, when Moses is called, which we are going to look at in our study tonight, there is a marvelous interplay of the divine and the human. It is God who calls, but Moses objects, and that indicates that there is a genuine human wrestling with God. When we talk about God calling and God doing His work, we are not denying the fact that there is human responsibility and human responsiveness to the things of God, and there must be a human responsiveness, and so in this particular case, God calls Moses, Moses objects.

In fact, Moses will even elicit a kind of compromise from the Lord God. In verse 14 of chapter 4, we read, “And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses, and He said, Is not Aaron the Levite thy brother? I know that he can speak well.” Moses had said he could not speak well. “And also, behold, he cometh forth to meet thee: and when he seeth thee, he will be glad in his heart. And thou shalt speak unto him, and put words in his mouth: and will be with thy mouth, and with his mouth, and will teach you what ye shall do.” So, Moses complains about not being able to talk, and so God says, “Okay, I will turn it over to Aaron,” and he loses the benefit of being the instrument of God that

he would have been, but nevertheless, even in spite of himself, Moses is going to be talking. So, even though Moses may object and elicit some kind of outward compromise with reference to God, finally he speaks in spite of himself, because it is God who calls sovereignly and accomplishes His will.

In some thought, Jewish thought as well as Gentile thought of Moses, Moses is sometimes looked at as if he were the discoverer of God, that is, he was a man who had a certain inner desires and certain inner interests, and because he had certain inner interests and certain inner desires and was concerned about the spiritual things, it is Moses who has discovered God. But we learn that Moses is not the discoverer of God, he is the one who is discovered by God and it is the Lord God who is supreme in His dealings with Moses.

Now, let us turn to Exodus, Chapter 3, and I say, we are going to divide the chapter into two parts: Next Tuesday and the following Tuesday, we will not be meeting simply because next Tuesday night is Christmas night and the next Tuesday night is New Year’s Day, and if we have meetings on those days, we would see a real remnant. [Laughter] And so, the elders and the office force did not have the faith to take a chance on that with my concurrence, [Johnson laughs] and so, we are going to pass up the next two nights, but we are going to take tonight the first 12 verses of chapter 3 and then the very important section in verse 13 through verse 22, we will do on, I think it is about January, the 6th or 7th, may be, of 1985, if we reach 1985.

Now, let us look at verse 1 through verse 6 and Moses describes here, the vision of the servant. Remember, Moses is called a servant, he is also a prophet. So, I am calling this, “a servant’s vision,” “the theophany,” that is “the vision God” and let me read verses 1 through 6.

“Now Moses kept, the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian: and he led the flock to the backside of the desert, and came to the mountain of God, even to

Horeb. (Horeb and Sinai are the same places, it seems) And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst, of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed. And Moses said, I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt. And when the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst, of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here am I. And he said, Draw not nigh, hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon, thou standest is holy ground. Moreover he said, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look, upon God.”

Now, this is a very remarkable event and it is certainly a very important event, because you remember that in the New Testament, when the Lord Jesus is conversing with the people of his day on the day of questions, in Matthew, chapter 22, this incident incidentally is also found in Mark and Luke, but in Matthew, chapter 22, verse, well it begins about in verse 23, the Sadducees came to Him, and remember, the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection and they ask Him, “Saying, Master, Moses said, If a man die, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother.

Now there were with us seven brethren...” You can just see these are fellows who have been to theological seminary and so they know all of the kinds of questions that have been manufactured in theological seminaries and they are still going on. If you were to write the book of questions that theological seminary students have thought up in the midst of classes, to try to confuse their teachers, John’s word would also apply to that. Even the world itself could not contain those questions. “And the first, when he had married a wife, deceased, and, having no issue, left his wife unto his brother: Likewise the second also, and the third, unto the seventh. And last of all, the woman died also. Therefore, in the resurrection whose wife shall she be of the seven? For they all had her. Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power

of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven.”

So, He said, “First of all you don’t understand the Scriptures. There is no marriage in heaven, because there is no need for the propagation of the race there. “But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying” -- now, here is the text from Exodus 3:6. So, our Lord was a student of this passage too. “I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. And when the multitude heard this, they were astonished at his doctrine.” So, the Lord Jesus cites this passage as support for the doctrine of the resurrection.

You can see then, that this is a remarkable passage and an important passage. And when you add to this, the fact that Stephen cites this passage in Acts, chapter 7, in his great sermon, you can see that the New Testament authors thought that this was an important event. The occasion of it is described in the first verse. Moses has now, has left Egypt, and Stephen tells us that he has been out there for about 40 years, and we read in verse 1 of chapter 3, “Now Moses kept, the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian.”

Now, if those of you can read Hebrew and may be some one in the audience, because I do not know everybody in the audience, this is in a construction, that is the verb to be in the perfect tense with a participle, and the result of this particular type of construction is that this is a reference to continuous past action. So, this is not something that just happened once. This was something that had been happening for a long time. We would render it in English with a progressive present or past, I should say.

Now Moses was keeping the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law. In fact, we might even say, Now Moses used to keep the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law, who was the priest of Midian. The traditional site at which this took place was “Gabel Musa” or “The Mountain of Moses” or “Moses” Mountain.” It was part of a range of mountains, it was

not the highest one, but one of the high ones, about 7500 sq. ft. in altitude. The description of the event follows in verse 2 and verse 3, “And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst, of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed.”

One thing that we ask right at the beginning is, Who was the Angel of Jehovah? Now, since we do not have time to deal with this as a separate issue, I am just going to give you the conclusion of orthodox theologians, and I think the correct conclusion. This is a reference to the second person of the Trinity in his pre-incarnate ministry. On other words, this is a reference to the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, Moses, in a moment, will say that he did not look upon the face of God. He did his fact because he was afraid to look upon God. Because he knew the truth and he expresses it in this very same book in chapter 33 that no man can look upon God and live.

Now, when he says this, “No man can look upon God and live,” it is obvious in the light of the full development of biblical doctrine that he means no one can look upon the essential being of God and live. Because we are unholy and the holiness of God would consume us. And so, no one can look upon the holiness of God. First time, the chapter 6 and verse 16 states very much the same truth, speaks about God whom no man has seen nor can see. So no one can see God in his essential being, but we have seen the Lord Jesus Christ, the apostles say. They say no man has seen God at any time.

The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared him and so in seeing the Lord Jesus, we have seen God, we have not seen God in his essential being, but we have seen the Glory of God manifested in the personal work of our Lord Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity. So here, the angel speaks and it is not long before God’s speaking and the substitution of the term, angel of the Lord for the Lord makes it plain that He is the second person of the eternal Trinity in his preincarnate ministry.

There are a number of these cases in the Old Testament. If you would like to look at one, Genesis, chapter 16, verse 7 and verse 13, you can put down that or look it up while I am talking, if you like, and there the same kind of thing occurs. A number of passages in the Old Testament confirm this fact. Now Moses then says this, “The angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush,” and he saw that the bush burned with fire and the bush was not consumed.

Now the fact that it burned with fire is very important. The fire is symbolic of judgment and the fire is also symbolic of purification and thus of holiness. One can go back right to the beginning of the Book of Genesis and remember after Adam and Eve were put out of the garden, God made it impossible for them to come back into the garden. So in chapter 3 and verse 24 of the Book of Genesis, we read, “So he drove out the man; and he placed at the East of the Garden of Eden, Cherubim and a flaming sword. Notice that, ‘a flaming sword,’ which turned every way to keep the way of the Tree of Life. Then we know that when the children of Israel, and we will spend a good bit of time on some of these things as the series progresses, led the children of Israel by the pillar of cloud in the daytime and the pillar of fire at night.

Now looking up in the daytime, he would see the pillar of cloud, but because of the brightness of the sun, you would not see the fire. The fire was there all along. At night, you could see the fire, because of the darkness. So, fire is one of the biblical symbols of God in his judgment and also in his purifying activity. Let us remember that, many passages in the Bible that speak of it, later on if we have time I will make a comment about another place or two, but you can go away all the way through to the books of the New Testament and see this thinking only of Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came and the same purifying and judgment activity of God is seen in the coming up of the Holy Spirit.

Now then, the third thing that I would like for you to note here is described in verses 4 through 6, and that is the revelation itself. So, he sees the bush burning and the

bush is not consumed, but God is going to speak out of it. You know it is interesting to read some of the things that people have suggested that Moses saw. Some have suggested that what he really saw was simply a thorn bush and the sun was shining upon it in a certain way that it looked like it was burning with fire. And then others have said that he saw a particular kind of bush, a kind of flaming bush, that looks all the time as if it were burning with fire.

And generally speaking, people like this will say that Moses was an individual who was very much concerned with certain subjective things. He was very concerned with the way the children of Israel had been treated by the Egyptians. He was very much upset over the fact that Pharaoh had taken away their several rights and so as a result of taking away their several rights, he was concerned, he had joined all kinds of movements out on the backside of the desert and had become convinced that the Lord God had put his hand upon him to deliver them and so he really did not see anything, but had a psychological vision, and we are not to think of this as a real bush that burned with fire.

Now fundamentally, lying back of this is the conviction of so many of our modern theologians that it is impossible for us in our present day to have any contradiction or contravention of natural law, such as Professor Bultmann who like to say that we live in a closed universe and it is impossible for miracles to occur. So, if a person has that presupposition, it is natural, of course, that he is not going to pay too much attention to this, but seek to explain it naturalistically.

But the Bible makes it very plain so far as the text is concerned that Moses did see precisely what he describes, and I submit to you that the person who is the best judge of what he saw was Moses himself and that is what he tells us. He says, he saw a bush burning and that bush was not consumed. This is symbolic of things that God wish to make plain to him. So in verse 4, the Lord saw that he turned aside to see and God called unto him out of the midst of the bush.

And now notice Moses had said in verse 2, the angel of the Lord appear unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of the bush, but now Moses says it is God who called unto him out of the midst of the bush, so you can see that Moses regarded the angel of the Lord as a divine being.

And God first of all said, “Moses, slip off your sandals.” That is what we do with sandals, is not it? You slip them off. That precious what the Hebrew word means here. It means “to slip off,” “get out of your sandals.” So think of your sandals. Now there were certain individuals in ancient times who generally went around barefoot. Now all us Southerners know what that means when June 1st comes in Alabama, you take off your shoes. I understand in Arkansas they live mostly a year with their shoes off, but now I am certain of that. That is the Texans say, but you take of your shoes.

Well, that is of course so you can have fun, so you can walk in the mud, and go down in the creek put your feet down in it and let the mud just kind of ooze through your toes. Later on by the way in this very passage, the Lord will use the verb, “ooze,” talking about the land that He is going to take amidst oozing with milk and honey. If fact, actually, that is the meaning of the Hebrew word later on, the land oozes with milk and honey.

Well anyway, in ancient times, it was the servant class who went around barefoot. Oh! We would say barefooted in the South. So, when He says, Draw not nigh, hither: put off thy shoes from off, thy feet,” the Lord is saying, “You take the position of a servant Moses. Now, later on the Lord will speak of Moses and He will described him just in that way. Notice in verse 7 of Numbers chapter 12, He will say, “My servant Moses is not so who is faithful in all my house. With him, I will speak mouth to mouth even apparently and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the Lord shall he behold: wherefore then were ye not afraid, to speak against my servant Moses?” So Moses is told to take off his shoes because the place is holy ground.

Moses assumes the place of a servant and then he hears this being servant of the Lord say, “I am the God of thy father.” I say the servant of the Lord, of course, it is said here to be the angel of the Lord, but if you know in Isaiah it is the angel of the Lord who is also called “the servant of the Lord,” but anyway the angel of the Lord or the true servant of the Lord speaks to Moses, the human servant and says in verse 6, “I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.”

Now this is the verse that our Lord Jesus Christ cites and he cites it as if it is evidence for the resurrection. Modern commentators again who do not believe the Scriptures like to say, this is no proof of the resurrection. The great German commentators who have been followed by a lot contemporary commentators, and Wellhausen said, “That all this means is that the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, existed in the past and that He was their God. He does not say anything about their resurrection at all.” And so, when the Lord Jesus says, answering the question about the resurrection, that the Old Testament says, “I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, it is obvious that He and Wellhausen do not agree.

Now, Wellhausen agrees with him now because Wellhausen is wherever he is [laughter] I would not put him in one place or the other. I have a pretty good idea of where he is, but I leave that for the final adjudication of the Great White Throne judgment, but anyway, the Scriptures following the Lord Jesus say that this is evidence for the resurrection.

Now, one of the reasons we have difficulty was something like this, it is that we often do not really look very seriously at these passages of the word of God. You can say, I am trying to speak like a scholar there when I say we do not look at these things seriously. I mean sufficiently deeply. Because, just think for a moment. It is possible to argue that He says, “I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob,” and if He is now the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of

Jacob, then those men are living now. And have some have sought to make that the argument of the passage.

In the New Testament, in Matthew, chapter 22, the verb, *ayme* in Greek, which means ‘I am’ is found, but it is not found in the parallel passages always, and so that is a rather shaky foundation on which to say, the proof the resurrection lies in the present tense. That is, Jesus, said, “I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob,” therefore, they must be living and look forward to the resurrection. I can understand how someone who is not a biblical believer might argue rather strenuously that that is a weak proof, weak evidence. Now, you can also say in Greek as well as in Hebrew and in other languages, you do not always have to have the verb “to be” specifically stated for it to be there. But I would like to suggest to you that that is not the point that the Lord is making nor is it the point that the Lord Jesus was making. He says, “God is not the God of the dead. He is the God of living.”

Now I contend that he was not arguing on the basis of a present tense as over against the past tense. I contend that he was arguing on the basis of the genitive case, that is, He is not the God of the dead, He is the God of the living. That is the living belong to him. Now, if you will think for just a moment about this context here and also about this verse, you will see at what Moses is told as to do with the Abrahamic Covenant. Remember, the Abrahamic Covenant made certain promises to Abraham and to his seed. And among those promises was the promise that Abraham and his seed would dwell on a land.

Now, in order for Abraham and his seed who have died to dwell on a land, there has to be a resurrection. In other words, explicitly involved to the Abrahamic promises is the doctrine of the resurrection. And if so God says that He is the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, who were given promises of dwelling on the land, and he acknowledges that they belong to Him. The promise of the resurrection is involved in the Abrahamic covenant. The argument in my opinion, is not based on the present tense,

it is over the against the past tense, but on the genitive, they belong to God, and the Abrahamic promises have been given by God, and those promises involve necessarily a life on the earth. That is why the Lord said, “Ye err, not knowing the Scriptures or the power of God.” The power of God to fulfill the Abrahamic promises. So, it seems to me that this is an excellent proof of the resurrection, and I am sorry that Wellhausen did not have it pointed out to him evidently.

Now let us look on at the explanation that follows in verses 7 through 10, for after saying that He is the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, they belong to him and they are going to inherit those promises, Moses hid his face. He was afraid to look upon God. He recognized that this is a divine being and he is afraid to look upon Him because he knows that whosoever looks on God shall die.

Now that is evident from chapter 33, we do not have time to talk to it and does not turn to it and it is not necessary to do so. Now, the Lord is going to speak further to Moses, and he will first speak of his concern. We read in verse 7, by the way it is Exodus 33:20, if you are interested in the verse which says, “If you look upon God, you will not live.” Verse 7, we read,

“And the Lord said I have surely seen the affliction of My people which are in Egypt and I have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters for I know their sorrows.”

God is truly concerned over the condition of Israel. One might say, why did not he come much earlier? Why wait all of these years, it has been 40 years since Moses left Egypt, what does he wait for forty years? Well, because there has to be a moral preparation of Israel as well. Their hearts must be prepared to receive the leadership of a man like Moses and follow him. As we are going to see, they went out of Egypt and it is not long before after having been delivered there in the land and they start complaining,

saying they want to go back eat the leeks and garlic, which they had there in Egypt. Why anyone would want to do that, I do not know. But things in the desert were not all that great evidently.

But God is very concerned, but there are times when he cannot act yet because there are things that he is doing in the heart of men so that we in our rebellion against God will finally see we cannot help ourselves, and we have to lean upon the Lord God. That takes a long time with some of us. Some of us are very hard-headed and therefore the truth of the word of God does not penetrate our minds until God has sent a number of things into our experience that it would have been wonderful if we could have avoided. The purpose is expressed in verses 8 and 9, “And I am come down to deliver them out of the hand, of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land oozing with milk and honey; unto the place of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites.” And I would like to say, and the Fort Worthites, but that is not part of the word.

Now, the aim of the theophany is unfolded here and one notices again the prominence of the land, notice he says, “He is going to bring them up out of the land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey, unto the place of the Canaanites.” That is, all of those nations who were there. It is that very land that He is going to give to Abraham and to his seed. So God’s promises to Abraham, remember where? “I am going to make a name great, I am going to give you a kingdom, I am going to give you a land.” As one of the commentators has pointed out, He promised Abraham who was a childless man, a son, a seed; he promised a landless nomad, a country; and he promised an unknown man, fame, and these three things - a seed and a land and fame, were essentially continuity and stability, and then also identity.

Now Moses has a place in this and we read in verse 9 and 10, “Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel has come unto me: and I have also seen the

oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them. Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth My people, the children of Israel out of Egypt.” And we translate, almost all of the translators translate this, “Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh in order that thou mayest bring forth My people the children of Israel out of Egypt.” It is little more emphatic than that, in my opinion, in the Hebrew text we have an imperative, so it is, “Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt.” So it is a very strong promise and command actually given to the servant mediator. Moses then is the prepared mediator now, and he was prepared by the training that he had in Egypt, as we saw, brought up in the house of Pharaoh’s daughter. He also had children. Remember he had two children. The names of his children were Gershom, he has been referred to already, and then he had another child by the name of Eliezer. Gershom is a name that marks Moses out as a sojourner, away from his own land, a stranger, living in a strange place. Eliezer means “God is my help,” and I think Moses learned a whole lot by having to take care of those children. He describes himself as a nursing father when he talks about how he is the leader of the children of Israelite of the land of Egypt and when they get out unto the wilderness, he will complain of it to the Lord and say, “I am a nursing father for these people.” So he was prepared, no doubt, by his own personal experiences for what going to happen, but particularly in the 40 years that he spent as a shepherd on the backside of the desert, and he was prepared to lead the children of Israel.

A shepherd is a ruler. In fact, the term “shepherd” is a term that means “to rule.” “Shepherd of my flock” means “to rule my flock, have the oversight of them.” And so in all of the experiences of a shepherd, Moses was trained for what he would ultimately do with the children of Israel.

I think also Moses was prepared by the solitude of the desert. Think of the days and nights that Moses spent by himself. He did not have to go home at night with the

traffic of Central Expressway and look at all of the people and their automobiles or in even their camels in those days, or their horses. He went out on the backside of the desert, and he was there by himself, and those sheep could not talk to him, and he could call their names and say few things to them, but they did not carry on an intelligent conversation. Moses reflected upon the Lord God and for forty years, he was prepared by God through personal meditation.

That is one of the things that marks most of the servants of the Lord God, and in measure today, the same thing. There is Elijah. We do not hear much about Elijah until suddenly he appears before the king and he announces that there is not going to be any rain. And you would think he has began his career and now he is going to be a great prophetic figure. The very next word that comes from the Lord God to him is to go over and sit by the brook, Cherith. And so, Carmel, where he has his great victory is preceded by months by the side of the brook, Cherith. God’s servants are those who have an experience presently with the Lord God and you can see that in Moses.

The apostles were chosen. Mark tells us that they might be with him and then they might preach. To be with him first, and then to preach. That is the trouble with a lot of preachers today. A lot of us preachers do not spend enough time alone with God, and so we do not get to know Him as we ought.

And Moses, I think, was also prepared by the hunger of an exile’s heart. He wanted to be with his people, and he wanted to be useful to the Lord God in service to them. Every Christian has something of the longing of the heart of an exile, because our home is not here. Our home is in heaven. That is what the Lord prays in John 17 and verse 24 for us. It expresses, I think, what we should have as an earnest yearning. “Father,” Jesus says, “I will that they also whom Thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which Thou hast given me.” So, here are the people of God, those given by God to the Son, and then what do those who are given to him, what is that Jesus is concerned for them? Why it is that they may behold his glory?

“Which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.”

What a magnificent prospect we have of entering the presence of the Lord and beholding the glory of the Son of God.

You can get some idea of the glory of the Son of God by the things that are said concerning him in Scripture. The apostle said, “We beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” But, there is far more glory belonging to the eternal Son than our eyes could even imagine and it is the earnest desire of the Lord Jesus that we be with him where he is, that we may behold his glory. Do you want to be there? Well, Moses, I think, had something, that he had the hunger of an exile. We have the hunger of exiles too. Our citizenship is not an earthly citizenship, it is a heavenly citizenship.

Now, what would you think Moses would say to this magnificent revelation. Oh! Let me immediately do the work. When we read, “Who am I that I should go unto Pharaoh and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?,” the response of Moses is draw back. And verse 11 and verse 12, give it, and I will just read verse 12, “And he said, Certainly I will be with thee; and this shall be a token or a sign unto thee, that I have sent thee: When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain.”

I like one thing that Moses’ reply indicates. He was a modest man now and a very humble man. And, I guess, looking at some of my own response of this to the word of God, I think I can understand why he said, “Who am I that I should go unto Pharaoh that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?” It is fine to have proper modesty and it is fine to have proper humility and no doubt this was the product of the long obscurity that he experienced in his 40 years in the back side of the desert, his years of discipline.

And also it characterizes of the servants of the Lord. You remember what Gideon said? Gideon said, “Look, I cannot be a deliverer. I am the least in my father’s house” –

tsayir, the Hebrew term is – “the least in my father’s house.” And then of course, as Jeremiah, when the Lord speaks to Jeremiah, he said, “But Lord, I am just a child.” And so, Moses says, “Who am I that I should go unto Pharaoh?” Self-distrust is very good, but only if it leads to trust in God. What the Scriptures say is, it is all right to say “I cannot,” but we ought to immediately follow with “He can,” and He can accomplish His great victories with the jawbone of an ass or with some trumpets and some fires and Gideon won his battles or in his own peculiar ways that glorify His greatness. God loves to do that.

So, now He answers Moses, and He says, “Moses, certainly, I will be with thee and this shall be the sign unto thee that I have sent thee.” So, He gives him an assurance first of all, that He is going to be with him. This is one of the great promises of the Bible. You remember that he said the same thing to Jacob. He said, “Jacob, I am going to be with you and furthermore, I am going to be with you until I do in you everything that I said I was going to do.” Do you like to have a promise like that. God says, “I will be with you until I do everything that I said I was going to do with you.”

Every one of us have that kind of promise. The Bible says he is going to conform us to the Lord Jesus Christ and the Scripture says that He is with us and He will accomplish that. Jacob did not have the promises that we have. Moses is given this great promise, “Certainly, I will be with thee.” Looking at this and the Hebrew text, this means simply, this is a Hebrew verb, it is the verb ‘to be.’ Earlier, ‘I will be’ and then ‘with thee,’ the prepositional phrase, and in a moment He will describe himself as the God “I am.” The same root word. So, it is just a way of saying, “Look Moses. I am.” He is going to be with you. The one who is the “I am,” the eternal God, the self-existent divine being will be constantly with you. And further, this is the sign.

Now, the commentators have had a great deal of discussion over what is meant by that little word, *zeb*, translated ‘this.’ Verse 12: “I will be with thee and this shall be the token unto thee.” What does ‘this’ refer to? Well, you might think, reading the verses, it

is punctuated in the English version that I have, that the sign is, that Moses is going to bring the people out of Egypt and they are going to come to Mount Horeb and they are going to worship God there. And that will come to pass. What is inside something in the future, one might wonder how can that be a sign at the present time. What they really need now, what Moses needs now, it seems to me, is something now, the sign that He will do, all of this.

So, without going into a lengthy explanation of why. Let me suggest to you, that the sign is the burning bush. That burning bush right before you. This is the sign, the burning bush. This is God’s guarantee of the success of the commission and the work of Moses and Moses was greatly impressed by this. In the 5th Chapter, in the 1st verse, he will say to Pharaoh, “Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Let my people go, that they may hold a feast unto me in the wilderness.” So, he knows that is going to take place. So, he takes these words at their face value.

And now I want to conclude with just a question and a brief explanation and answer. What is the meaning of the sign? If this is the sign, the burning bush, what is the meaning of the sign? Here is a bush that is burning and is not consumed. Now, what kind of bush it is, we do not know. This word is used only one other time in the Old Testament and Deuteronomy chapter 33, that there it is a reference back to this. It is a reference to the God who appeared at the bush. So, we do not really know. It has been suggested that since the bamboo bush was very common in this part of the land that it is just a bamboo bush. You look it up in Hebrew dictionaries, it often will be said to be a “blackberry bush,” and makes sense, but there is no certainty that it was a blackberry bush.

What is true of it under any circumstance is that it was an insignificant little plant. It is just a bush. So, I would suggest to you that this is representative of the Nation Israel. Because, after all, this is a sign for Moses, related to the Abrahamic covenant that God is

going to bring them out of the land and they are going to worship at Mount Sinai in the future. So, I suggest to you that the bush is representative of Israel.

Now, Israel is burning. There is a fire that is playing all over the bush. What does the fire represent? Well, the fire represents the divine being. God, in his justice, in his purifying mercy, in his loving kindness in the fulfillment of his promises. And so, what in effect He says is, “I am going to judge Israel and I am going to purify Israel through My purifying mercy, they are going to have to pass through the judgment of them as natural beings, but I am going to exercise covenant mercy to them and bring them out. And even though they are going to go through the midst of the divine fire, they are not going to be touched by it through divine redemption. In other words, this is a visible picture of the Nation Israel, as that nation which is the object of divine judgment and divine mercy through the Mediator, ultimately, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Isaiah says, in Isaiah chapter 33 and verse 14, in words that are very reminiscent, I think, of the work of the Lord Jesus, “The sinners in Zion are afraid. Fearfulness has surprised the hypocrites. Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?” Well, there is one group of people that shall. The elect of God. The elect of God in Israel, the elect of God in the Christian church forming the people of God, there are individuals who by the grace of God, pass through his divine judgment in the fact that their redeemer bears their judgment for them and they are judged in Him and through the mediatory or mercy of the redeemer, they inherit the promises of God.

Now, the bush is unconsumed. It burns, but it is not consumed. This is a simple representation of the unconditional promises of God. Israel will be judged, will pass through judgment, but Israel, the people of God, the true people of God, will not be consumed because the unconditional promises have been given to them. It is a lovely thing as you read verse 6, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob; verse 10, where he says, “Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh that thou

mayest bring forth, my people, the children of Israel out of Egypt and then verse 12,
“Certainly I will be with thee. This is the token. When thou hast brought forth the
people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain.”

Every one knows that a thorn bush burns. But here is one that does not. Oh the
holiness and the justice and the lovingkindness of God! Moses will be the instrument, not
the agent. He will be the conveyer of the blessing, not the promoter of the blessing. He
will be a channel and not the source of the blessing, and we learn of course that the fire
of God’s presence needs no human fuel. He is the one who is going to accomplish the
purposes and when I am weak, then I am strong.

What a magnificent revelation this is of the essential nature of his God and of his
covenant promises to his people. Moses must have been greatly encouraged by this.
Ultimately, as he reflected upon it and the saints of God down through the years have
been tremendously encouraged, by those unconditional promises of divine redemption,
we are judged in a substitute and we come free by virtue of the mercy given us by that
substitute. What a wonderful thing it is to be a child of God. May God help us to truly
appreciate it! Let’s close in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are thankful to thee for these marvelous words that Moses has
written and how they do minister to us so many centuries after he wrote them. Give us
understanding as we continue to read and study.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.